

NEWS RELEASE

POLICE HANDLING OF ARRESTEES

Police Handling of Arrestees has had and still has high priority on the program of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People since its organization in 1909. The New Orleans Branch NAACP is no exception in that it has called to the attention of the Police Department and other public officials concerned, incidents and cases reported to us where-in alleged police brutality, discourteous treatment, abuse and conduct unbecoming public servants are reported.

The recently published report of the Reverend Joseph H. Fichter, S.J., on the "Police Handling of Arrestees" and the reaction to it by the Police Department and others is of grave concern to the local branch of the NAACP. This press conference was called to express that concern which is not designed to take sides but merely to present facts from our files and experiences.

We want it clearly understood that we are as greatly concerned in having a good police department and other public officials as anyone in our community for the image it portrays.

It cannot be gainsaid that the functioning of the police department in effectuating arrests will involve Negroes as well as anyone else, for there are and probably will continue to be Negroes who run afoul of the law. But to justify the abuse and mistreatment of Negroes because more of them are arrested than whites is to create a police state rather than provide good law enforcement. And this Superintendent Giarrusso does when he points to arrest statistics to answer the report charge that some police officers discriminate in handling Negro Arrestees. There is absolutely no connection between the two. If every Negro in New Orleans to a man were a criminal and warranted arrest, would their physical abuse be justified? We think not. Yet, by Superintendent Giarrusso's statement about statistics, this abuse would not be objected. If this represents the true attitude toward law enforcement in New Orleans, then we are indeed in need of corrective measures.

Another example of no connectivity between the report charge and the answer of the police department is with respect to the promoting of Negro police officers. In answering that, Superintendent Giarrusso points to the fact that the department just concluded an intensive recruitment program for more Negro applicants to the force. This has nothing to do with the promoting of the Negro officers who have long tenure, qualifications and loyalty on the force.

As we stated above we have called to the police department and other public officials matters affecting the police which have been reported to us which are documented. We cite a few as examples of alleged police brutality, abuse, idscourteous treatment and conduct unbecoming public servants.

1. Elder Lane B. Goings - On May 13, 1963 we called the attention of the police department to the arrest of Elder Lane B. Goings, an 87-year-old Minister by Sixth District police on April 19, 1963 on a charge of being drunk in public. On January 6, 1964, we again called the attention of the police department and again on January 29, 1964. On February 18, 1964 it was reported to us by the police department that the matter was still open.
2. Ezell Ward - On May 30, 1963 we again called the attention of the police department to the death in the Sixth District police station on April 22, 1961. We gave the final diagnosis of the Orleans Parish Coroner's office, names of witnesses who viewed the beating by police and names of witnesses who viewed the body of Ezell Ward before preparation for burial. On January 6, 1964, we again called the attention of the police department and again on January 29, 1964. On February 18, 1964 it was reported to us by the police department that Ezell Ward died a Natural death.
3. Miss Luvenia Prince - On May 31, 1963 we called the attention of the police department of the assault on this victim by four (4) white men who threw a brick striking the lady as she walked in the 1600 block of Andry Street. Also, the names and addresses of witnesses and license plate number of the car in which the men were riding. On January 6, 1964 we again called the attention of the police department and again on January 29, 1964. On February 18, 1964, it was reported to us that the matter was Handled.

4. Lawrence C. Chaney - On June 13, 1963 we reported to the police department that Mr. Lawrence C. Chaney had been arrested on May 19, 1963 on suspicion of rape and murder. And that he, Lawrence C. Chaney alleged receiving a whipping twice a day for nine days until released by three (3) police officers in civilian attire. On January 6, 1964, we again called the attention of the police department and again on January 29, 1964. On February 18, 1964 it was reported to us by the police department. No Complainant.
5. Mrs. Sweetola Hollingsworth - On July 29, 1963 we filed a complaint with the police department on behalf of the occupants of 2650 Montegut Street, alleging violations of their civil rights by police officers in patrol cars No. 53 and No. 55, on July 16, 1963, in that they the police fired pistols shots into this home without known cause or provocation. On January 6, 1964, we again called the attention of the police department and again on January 29, 1964. On February 18, 1964 the police department informed us that there was no complainant.
6. On February 14, 1963 a sub-committee of the Legal Redress Committee of the local branch had a conference with Superintendent Giarrusso and his aide in re: abuse, brutality, harassment and discourteous treatment of citizens by police officers. Mr. Giarrusso stated that this topic was of mutual interest because the department did not condone such actions by the police. On a subsequent conference with Superintendent Giarrusso, a sub-committee presented Mr. Arthur Marsalis, a U. S. Letter-Carrier in uniform, who was arrested at 5:00 A.M. in the vicinity of the post office as a victim of police discourtesy. Superintendent Giarrusso said that he would discipline the police officers involved.
7. We also have copies of statement made to the P.B.I. by Wilson Joseph Robin, age 23, alleging police brutality and discourteous treatment on January 21, 1964, by two uniformed police officers. And, Clarence Joseph Blackwell, age 15, alleging police brutality, illegal entry and unlawful search and seizure occurring on March 15, 1964.

8. Last but not least to these documented facts is the nation wide, perhaps universal knowledge of the deplorable act of police officers dragging by the feet, the Reverend Avery C. Alexander, from the cafeteria in City Hall to the paddy wagon after having been arrested because he wanted to eat.

RECOMMENDATION

In view of the reports made to us and our experiences we recommend that a Citizens Committee be appointed, to investigate with subpoena powers matters pertaining to the conduct of police officers, rather than the present P.B.I.

LEGAL REDRESS COMMITTEE
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